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**IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
APPLICATION FOR UNITED STATES LETTERS PATENT**

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TITLE:

BASEBALL BASE WITH
IDENTIFICATION

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BASEBALL BASE WITH IDENTIFICATION

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field Of The Invention

This invention relates to bases for use during the play of baseball or softball.

Discussion Of Related Art

Baseball and softball are each increasingly looking for ways to market their respective sports to the general public. One popular way of marketing their sports is to sell baseball or softball equipment that includes the logo of a baseball or softball team. Such equipment has traditionally been limited to team uniforms, bats, gloves and baseballs. For example, baseball caps that include the logo of a baseball team are a popular item to sell to the general public. Accordingly, there is a need to diversify the types of baseball or softball equipment that are sold to the general public.

Besides the general public, another way to market baseball and softball is to provide merchandise that would be of interest to collectors of sports memorabilia. There are more than 16.7 million collectors worldwide. Sports fans have over the years collected images or products as used by sports players. Significant interest has been generated by collectors to obtain game used items. Such items in this category would be baseballs, baseball bats, jerseys, hats, shoes, batting gloves, etc. To a collector, such equipment can be commonplace to buy and collect.

One game used item that has not been truly recognized as a valuable or interesting collectible item is the baseball base. This lack of recognition is due to the fact that a baseball base by itself generally does not have the ability to ^{be} identified as being a game or event specific item.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

One aspect of the present invention regards a base for use during the play of baseball or softball that includes a bottom, a top face, a side wall attached to the bottom and the top face and an identification label attached to either the top face or the side wall.

A second aspect of the present invention regards a method of retrofitting an existing base for use during the play of baseball or softball that includes providing an

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existing base with a top face and a side wall attached to the top face and attaching an identification label to either the top face or the side wall.

Each aspect of the present invention provides the advantage of diversifying the types of baseball or softball equipment that are sold to the general public.

Each aspect of the present invention provides the advantage of improving the collectability of a baseball or softball base.

The foregoing features and advantages of the present invention will be further understood upon consideration of the following detailed description of the invention taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of an embodiment of a base according to the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a top view of the base of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a side view of the base of FIG. 1;

FIG. 4 is a bottom view of the base of FIG. 1;

FIG. 5 is a bottom perspective exploded view of the base of FIG. 1;

FIG. 6 is a central side cross-sectional view of the base of FIG. 1 when anchored to the ground;

FIG. 7 is a perspective view of an embodiment of an identification label to be used with the base of FIG. 1 according to the present invention;

FIG. 8 is a front view of the identification label of FIG. 7;

FIG. 9 is a side view of the identification label of FIG. 7;

FIG. 10 is a perspective view of a second embodiment of a base according to the present invention; and

FIG. 11 is a perspective view of a second embodiment of an identification label to be used with the base of FIG. 10.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Referring now to the drawings wherein like reference characters designate identical or corresponding parts throughout the several figures, and in particular FIGS. 1-6 show a base 20 to be used in either baseball or softball. As shown in FIG. 5, the bottom 22 of the base 20 includes a square-like recess 24 that is bounded by square-like

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lip 26 that has a thickness of approximately $3/8$ ". The sides 28, 30, 32 and 34 of the lip 26 each have a width of approximately 1.5" and a length of approximately 10.25". An opening 36 is formed directly below the sides 28, 30, 32 and 34 so that the distance from the top surface 38 of the recess 24 to the top surface 40 of the lip 26 is approximately 0.75". -

As shown in FIG. ⁶⁰5, the base 20 further includes a metal post 42 that is attached to the center of the bottom 22 of the base 20. The post 42 is inserted into an opening 44 of a central support 46 that is welded to the center of a square-like metal plate 48. Once inserted, the post 42 is welded to the central support 46. The metal post 42 has a height of approximately 5.5" and has a square-like cross-section where the walls 50, 52, 54 and 56 of the post 42 each have a width of approximately 1.5".

The metal plate 48 is placed into the recess 24 so that the edge 58 of the plate 48 extends into the opening 36 by approximately 1.5" and lies above the lip 26. Once the edge 58 is inserted into the opening 36, the lip 26 is secured to the plate 48 by screws 60 that are inserted through aligned holes of metal brackets 62, the lip 26 and the plate 48. The screws 60 engage the holes of the plate 48. The fully formed base 20 is shown in FIGS. 1-4.

The base 20 is anchored or fixed in position for play inserting the post 42 into a retaining sleeve 64 buried in the ground (base path). As shown in FIG. 6, the top of sleeve 64 extends just below ground level. The post 42 and sleeve 64 are preferably non-circular in cross-section to avoid rotation of the base 20. The base itself 20, with the post 42 attached, may be removed after the conclusion of play, for safe keeping or use elsewhere, but the anchoring sleeve remains in place.

The top face 66 of the base 20 is contoured to slope downwardly at its edges so as to have a slightly rounded top or crown 68. The crown 68 rises approximately 1.5" above the top edges 70 of the sidewalls 72, 74, 76 and 78 of the base 20. The top or upper face 66 of the base 20 may be provided with traction-improving grooves or ridges to assist base runners. The base 20 is also rigid enough to withstand being stepped upon or run over without deforming.

The size and general shape of the base 20 are preferably standard in that the base 20 is preferably square-like in shape. Accordingly, the rectangular sidewalls 72, 74, 76

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and 78 are identical in shape having a length of approximately 15" and a height of approximately 1 11/16".

The base 20 preferably is made of rubber or other resiliently deformable material of a hardness in the range of 50 to 70, as measured by a Shore durometer. The particular hardness can be selected to correspond in general to the average age and consequently the weight of the players. A more resilient (softer) base would be used by lighter weight players, and a less resilient material would be used by adult players.

As shown in FIGS. 1, 3 and 7-9, the sidewalls 72 and 78 include a rectangular cutout 80 that is centrally located in the sidewall. The rectangular cutout 80 has a length of approximately 2 1/8", a height of approximately 1 3/16" and a depth of approximately 0.100". The cutout 80 is dimensioned so as to receive an identification label 82. As shown in FIGS. 1 and 3, the identification label 82 has dimensions similar to that of the cutout 80 and is made of a clear plastic so that indicia and/or symbols 84 can be seen through the plastic. The identification label 82 is constructed with a photopolymer coating applied over a printed image of the indicia and/or images 84. The end result is a domed three dimensional identification label 82 that heals itself if scratched or indented while safeguarding the quality of the image it creates.

As shown in FIGS. 1 and 3, the identification label 82 is inserted into the cutout 80 so that the indicia and/or symbols 84 are visible. Examples of possible indicia are a team logo/name, a league logo/name, a corporate logo/name or a name of a sporting event. The identification label 82 is attached to the base 20 by using an adhesive that is applied to the back of the identification label 82 and makes contact with a rear wall of the cutout 80.

While the above example regards having identification labels 82 for side walls 72 and 78, it is understood that similar identification labels 82 can be attached one or more of the other side walls 74, 76 or top face 66 by inserting the identification labels 82 into cutouts formed in those side walls or top face that are similar to cutout 80 described above. Furthermore, multiple identification labels 82 can be attached to a single sidewall or the top face 66 by forming multiple cutouts 80 in the sidewall or top face.

Note that it is also possible to retrofit existing bases with one or more identification labels 82 by forming one or more cutouts, like cutout 80, in the side wall(s)

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or top face of the existing base. Next, identification label(s) 82 are placed in the formed cutouts and attached therein via an adhesive in a manner similar to that described previously. [Examples of known bases that can be retrofitted is the base disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5,000,447, the entire contents of which are incorporated herein by reference, and the base sold by Schutt Athletic Sales under the trademark Schutt Sports.]

A second embodiment of a baseball base is shown in FIGS. 10 and 11. The baseball base 20' is almost identical in structure with the baseball base 20 of FIGS. 1-9. The one difference in structure is that an identification label in the form of a release paper 100 (indicated by dashed lines) with a screen print image 102 is added to the top of the base 20. The release paper 100 with the screen print image 102 is placed on top of the base and then the release paper 100 is heat transferred onto the top of the base by heating the release paper 100 to a temperature of approximately 325°F for approximately 3 minutes. [Note that the release paper is readily available and is commonly used to transfer decals onto shirts and the like.]

As shown in FIGS. 10 and 11, the screen print image 102 is indicia that can be the name of a sporting event, such as the World Series. Of course, other indicia are possible, such as a team logo/name, a league logo/name or a corporate logo/name.

Note that while FIG. 10 shows the release paper 100 attached to the top of the base 20', the release paper 100 can be attached to any one of the side walls 72, 74, 76 and 78 in the same manner described above. Thus, the size and shape of the release paper 100 depends on the desired size and shape of the indicia as well as whether the release paper 100 is to be attached to the top or a side wall.

A variation of the base 20' shown in FIG. 10 is not to use the cutouts and inserts for the identification label and instead only use one or more release labels 100 with a screen print image thereon as described previously.

Note that it is also possible to retrofit existing bases with one or more identification labels embodied as a release paper 100 with screen print image 102. Such retrofitting involves placing one or more release papers 100 with screen print images 102 onto one or more side wall(s) or the top face of the existing base. Next, the release papers 100 are heat transferred onto the existing base in the manner described above. Examples of known bases that can be retrofitted is the base disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5,000,447, the entire contents of which are incorporated herein by reference, and the

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base sold by Schutt Athletic Sales under the trademark Schutt Sports. Note that while the preferred material for the base is rubber, existing bases made of other materials, such as vinyl or canvass, can have the release papers 100 with screen print images 102 heat transferred to their top and/or side walls by the same process.

In summary, the identification labels shown in FIGS. 1-11 allows for a baseball or softball base to easily become a collector's item. For example, a special sporting event, such as the opening of a new stadium or a closing of a stadium can be marked on the base 20 or 20' and then sold to an interested party. In addition, an such as the World Series can be identified on the base 20 or 20' and player autographs be applied to the base to further enhance the value of the specific game used product. These examples show how particular pieces of sports history can be specifically preserved and identified in a field equipment product of the game or special event, such as a base.

The foregoing description is provided to illustrate the invention, and is not to be construed as a limitation. Numerous additions, substitutions and other changes can be made to the invention without departing from its scope as set forth in the appended claims.

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